

Alaska Board of Forestry 2012 Annual Report to the Governor

A Review of the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act: Its Implementation and Effectiveness

May 13, 2013

The Alaska Board of Forestry

The Board of Forestry provides a forum for forest practices issues and management of forests on state land. The Board monitors the implementation and effectiveness of the Forest Resources and Practices Act and reports its findings to the Legislature and Governor. Board members represent the following constituencies:

- ♦ Native Corporations, Ron Wolfe
- ♦ Professional Forester, Wayne Nicolls
- ♦ Recreation, Erin McLarnon
- ♦ Mining, Jeff Foley
- ♦ Fish & Wildlife Biologist, Matt Cronin
- ♦ Timber Industry, Eric Nichols
- ♦ Fishing Industry, Mark Vinsel
- ♦ Environmental Interests, Chris Stark
- ♦ DNR State Forester, Chris Maisch, Chair

2012 Report from the Board of Forestry to the Governor on the Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA)

May 13, 2013

Background

The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA, AS 41.17) governs how commercial timber harvesting, reforestation, and timber access occur on state, private, and municipal land. Forest management standards on federal land must also meet or exceed the standards for state land established by the Act.

The Act is designed to protect fish habitat and water quality and ensure sustainable forest management through prompt reforestation of forest land while providing for a healthy timber industry. The FRPA helps the timber and fishing industries continue to provide long-term jobs.

FRPA balances economic concerns for the timber industry with water quality and habitat protection needs. The FRPA framework provides certainty and credibility for landowners, operators, and the public, and establishes one-stop shopping for forest operation compliance with state and federal clean water and coastal management standards.

FRPA Effectiveness

The Board of Forestry is charged with assessing and reporting on the effectiveness of the Forest Resources and Practices Act. We base our assessment on compliance and effectiveness monitoring, field inspections, and reports from the departments of Natural Resources (DNR), Environmental Conservation (DEC), and Fish and Game (ADF&G).

Compliance monitoring. The compliance monitoring program is designed to ensure that FRPA is properly implemented, and to correct any implementation problems through training and, if necessary, enforcement. The Division of Forestry now has ten years of compliance data for southeast Alaska, nine years for southcentral, and eight years for the interior. This data comprises nearly 20,000 individual field ratings of best management practices, and has proven to be a valuable tool to identify practices in need of improvement. In 2012, the agencies conducted 213 field inspections on forest operations statewide and compliance monitoring score sheets were part of every inspection. The data shows solid implementation rates in all regions. Overall, the southeast and southcentral regions averaged 4.9 out of 5.0 on the ratings, and the interior region scored 4.6. The interior rating demonstrates the importance of the compliance monitoring – in 2009, compliance monitoring revealed numerous road maintenance issues on state land in interior Alaska. The state responded with a funding increment for road maintenance in FY12, and the Division of Forestry was able to strengthen maintenance activities and fix the problems.

Effectiveness monitoring. We are proud to report that 2013 is the 20th year of FRPA effectiveness monitoring. The centerpiece of the effectiveness monitoring is a long-term study of the status and trends of fish habitat conditions on Native corporation land in Southeast Alaska. State and federal resource agencies, fishermen, the timber industry, and private landowners have cooperated and helped to fund the program which has been led by Sealaska Corporation. The

study has tracked pool habitat, woody debris, and streambed substrate in 18 watersheds before and following timber harvest. Data extends from eight years before harvesting to ten years afterwards. The study has been able to document changes in these stream parameters over time, but has found no identifiable loss of fish habitat after harvesting. This study demonstrates that the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act is effective in protection fish habitat and water quality. A full report on this study is scheduled for release later this year.

Agency reports. DNR, DEC, and ADF&G all review detailed plans for forest operations on non-state land and forest land use plans for state land, and participate in field inspections for issues in their areas of expertise. DNR and ADF&G also jointly conduct forest road condition surveys. All three agencies report that the Act is effective in protecting fish habitat and water quality from impacts of forest operations.

Continuing effectiveness. The Forest Resources & Practices Act has a solid record of protecting public resources and ensuring that the timber and fishing industries can operate efficiently. This success is founded on the commitment of the three state resource agencies to oversee the Act's implementation and maintain an active field presence. The Board strongly supports adequate funding for the agencies' forest practices budgets, including the FY 14 increment for \$85,000 requested by ADF&G.

Southeast timber industry

The Alaska Timber Jobs Task Force did an excellent job of highlighting the serious state of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska, and the grave impacts of timber sector declines on Southeast communities. The Board is on record in support of the Task Force report and its recommendations to address this situation. In particular, the Board urges the Governor to

- Move forward with state efforts to execute the recommendations, as documented in the attached chart of implementation actions. We also ask the Governor to support the efforts of the Working Forest Group to inform the public on the state of Tongass National Forest management and the movement to consider a healthy environment, society, and economy when making forest management decisions on the Tongass and other forests in Alaska.
- Support resolution of land ownership issues, including Native land entitlements, accomplishment of the proposed Mental Health Trust land exchange with the US Forest Service, and acquisition of additional state land.
- Continue to contest federal decisions that inappropriately constrain the timber industry. We appreciate the Administration's challenges to damaging federal rulings regarding application of the Roadless Rule on the Tongass, National Pollution Discharge Elimination Permitting (NPDES) on forest roads, and listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that are not supported by scientific data. We applaud your process of working with the state agencies to develop a consolidated state position on these issues. We also recommend that the State brief Congress on scientific flaws in the ESA process, including federal agencies' selective use of science, a closed review system for ESA documents, selective consideration of state and public comments, scientifically subjective designations of subspecies and distinct population segments, use of predicted future impacts rather than real data, and court deference to federal agency decisions for ESA listings.

- Continue DNR and ADF&G involvement in national forest planning in Alaska and timber sale development in the Tongass National Forest.

State Forests

Across the state, DNR has a track record of managing state land to provide sustainable supplies of timber for commercial and personal use and access for forest management and public use. State forest management has provided a lifeline to Southeast timber companies, and is the basis for proposals to improve the economics of interior communities by providing wood fuel to replace costly petroleum. The best way to ensure that the state can continue to provide these services is by dedicating a forest land base for the long term. The Board is on record in support of the Task Force recommendations to expand the system of legislatively-designated State Forests statewide, and to establish a Susitna State Forest through House Bill 79/Senate Bill 28.

Summary

The Forest Resources and Practices Act continues to protect public forest resources. We appreciate the State's efforts on behalf of FRPA implementation and your support for the diverse and sustainable uses of Alaska's forests. We look forward to working with you to foster a sustainable timber industry along with the sustainable fisheries, healthy air, and clean water that Alaskans treasure.

Sincerely,

Chris Maisch, State Forester
Chair, Alaska Board of Forestry

Attachments

- Annual Report to the Board of Forestry: 2012 Forest Practices Effectiveness. March 7, 2013
- 2012 Annual Report to the Board of Forestry. DEC Division of Water. March, 2013.
- 2012 Annual Report to the Board of Forestry. ADF&G Habitat Division. March, 2013.
- Alaska Timber Jobs Task Force Recommendations and Status. March 21, 2013.
- Letter from Board of Forestry to Governor Parnell in support of the Alaska Timber Jobs Task Force final report. January 10, 2013
- Letter from Board of Forestry to House Resources Committee in support of HB 79. March 28, 2013.

Distribution

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